



Focus on general Covid 19 Guidance and managing anxiety for ASN

What is 'normal' anxiety right now?

With constant news stories about Corona Virus overwhelming our daily lives most of us will be living in a state of heightened anxiety. Daily conversations, radio, TV and social media make it difficult to 'take a break' and give ourselves moments of calm from the anxiety that this experience is inevitably causing. Many people are worrying about who will and how many will get ill and possibly die; the impact on families, finance, education, employment and housing is likely to take its toll. People are experiencing some **difficult but very normal feelings** such as anxiety, fear, anger, irritation or sadness.

Relationships are extremely important to human beings because without them we could not survive. When relationships are threatened in some way, we have an inbuilt and intense psychological and emotional response (think about all the things that upset you deeply, how many of them relate to something between you and another person?). If threats are intense or prolonged in some way, we can get stuck in 'fight, flight or freeze' responses.

People are more likely to feel traumatized when they feel helpless or have a lack of control over a situation.

Corona Virus may feel like a constant threat to relationships because...

- People are having to self-isolate from those who they care about or whom they depend upon on.
- People fear the impact of illness and death for themselves and others.
- There is a reduction in ability to engage with activities outside of the home where social connectedness may have played a key role.
- Strained relationships where families are forced to self-isolate together with limited opportunity for personal space.
- There is a disruption from normal social networks, schools and friendships for children, employment and social groups for adults.

Anxiety in parents and carers

Helping parents/carers to manage their own mental health (as much as possible) is key to keeping their children calm. It's ok for parents/carers to express that they are anxious, and that these are strange times for everyone

Trying to present a calm, resilient front will be helpful for your child / children. Try to do this by:

- You are important too. Try to maintain your own self-care routines as much as possible. If this is a marathon not a sprint you will need energy at the end.
- Please also follow the guidance regarding managing your own routines, social connectedness and mental health will be vital in helping you to stay well and continue being able to support your child.
- Having someone to talk to outside of your children (a friend, family member, telephone counsellor)
- Take time to process the news before you speak to your child / children. Our urgency can affect our delivery of information
- Be reassured that it is ok to 'circle back' on a conversation that you may be too anxious to respond to right now.
- Try and be clear about what worries are child appropriate (for example, global death toll is not relevant, children should not have to carry the burden of financial concerns)

What might parents and carers notice in themselves during this time.

- Being preoccupied with the news, constantly 'checking' for updates.
- Finding it difficult to focus on day to day activity.
- Feeling 'uptight or tense'
- Increased muscle tension, increased heart rate, chest tightness, increased breathing rate, fatigue, changes in sleeping patterns.
- Losing their own self-care routines to prioritise the care of others.
- Feeling less patient and more irritable than you typically would.
- Normal but increased feelings of anxiety, fear, worry, sadness, anger.

Corona Virus and children and young people with ASN

In addition to the anxiety experienced by the general population, children and young people with ASN will inevitably experience more health anxiety at the moment, which is anxiety that centres around health and illness. We might also see increased general anxiety.

What may this anxiety look like?

Anxiety in children with ASN can look very differently depending on their age and stage of development and how much information they have successfully processed regarding the current situation.

Examples of anxiety may include;

- Clinginess – a need for reassurance and fear of being alone
- Being tearful and / or withdrawn
- Bed wetting
- Sore tummy or feeling generally poorly (sometimes with no evidence of symptoms)
- Lack of appetite or overeating
- Repetitive behaviours
- Need for more control
- Nightmares
- Increased irritability, angry outbursts
- Lack of concentration
- Avoidance of activities (even those they used to love)
- Lots of bad thoughts, feelings of doom, thinking of the worst case scenario
- Behaviours could be getting played out in play (toys may be getting unwell)
- Preoccupation with the news, constantly checking for updates.
- Finding it difficult to focus on day to day activity.
- Increased muscle tension, increased heart rate, chest tightness, increased breathing rate, fatigue, changes in sleeping patterns.
- Seeking more reassurance than normal to help manage the constant daily changes evident in their lives.

Noticing worry in children who may not notice

Worry schedules/charts (organised by time of day or activity) are a tool we can use with children where possible to try to understand patterns of behaviour. These are useful for children who may not know they are worried or why

We might notice at certain times of the day (bedtime) or during transitions (going out for exercise) and change how we approach these.



The chart is a grid with a cartoon character of a boy in a red shirt and yellow shorts on the left. The title is 'Rate My "Worry" Chart'. The vertical axis is labeled 'Level of Worry' and ranges from 1 to 8, with 'Mostly Worried' at the top and 'No Worry' at the bottom. The horizontal axis lists activities: 'Hearing', 'Typing', 'Cutting', 'Cleaning Up Desk', 'Drawing/ Art', 'Talking to Teacher', 'Talking to Friends', 'Use Computer', 'Loud Places', and 'Homework'. The grid is empty for data entry.

	Hearing	Typing	Cutting	Cleaning Up Desk	Drawing/ Art	Talking to Teacher	Talking to Friends	Use Computer	Loud Places	Homework
8										
7										
6										
5										
4										
3										
2										
1										
No Worry										

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<https://www.pocketot.com/product/rate-worry-chart/>

(This is a paid resource, however, you could build your own using traffic lights etc)

Key messages for parents and carers

- Expect stress!
- Stay connected to friends and family. **Offer time** for your child to talk to you about their concerns regularly. Providing open but containing communication will help them feel less alone.
- Reduce access to rolling news. **Limit time spent watching news stories**, set a time of day when you will catch up with what is happening and try to support your child to engage with other activities during the rest of the day. Also consider supervising children with screens
- Don't make promises you can't keep (ie. "things will be back to normal by your birthday")
- Focus on things that reduce anxiety: routine, open communication, exercise, connecting to others. This can also include regulating activities. When we are **stuck in 'threat' mode** all of the time, we all have certain activities that help to **calm us down**.
 - Focus on activities that use muscles and get the person moving. Day to day tasks that can be regulating include hoovering or carrying the laundry. Leisure activities might include stretching or yoga.
 - Think about what activities usually calm the person and more specifically what it is about that activity that calms them.
- **Relaxation and mindfulness-based activities** can help calm busy minds AND calm the physiological reactions of trauma and anxiety. Practicing regularly, even when you feel calm will increase their efficacy.
- **Support your child to take individual control over whatever they can to reduce feelings of helplessness.** Control over hand washing, opportunities to help others and so on can help to help people feel more in control
- **Sleep, sleep sleep!** Try to avoid conversations about Corona Virus just before bed to encourage sleep.
- **Consider how much 'Corona Virus' talk there is around your child.** Is it helpful information giving or is it escalating anxiety?
Talk about who's job it is to worry and 'fix' the issue. For example, "There are a lot of scientists, doctors, health professionals etc. who are working very hard to make sure that we get through this, which we will do"
- **What does your child understand?**
How much does your child understand what is happening at the moment? Think about what and how much might be useful to share with them. **Use easy read or visual resources to back up communication if needed.**

Positive Coping Skills

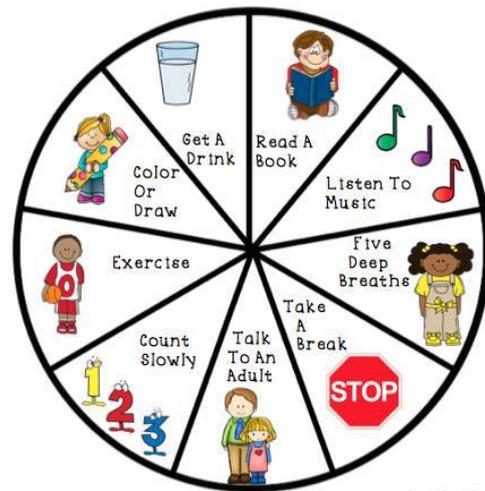
For some children and young people, worry relief visuals (like a coping wheel) may be useful. The coping skills are things a child has chosen that help relieve the worry like:

- a hug from mum
- going into the garden
- 10 jumping jacks
- singing a song

The child/young person is encouraged to find a coping mechanism and use it when they feel worried, and praised when they do. In order to avoid repetitive behaviours, it may also be beneficial to mix up elements on the coping wheel.

Coping Skills Wheel

9 Ways to Handle Big Emotions



Another idea could be to use worry tokens:

- With any anxiety, it's important to try and make the thoughts less catastrophic in nature, providing alternative narratives as much as possible.
- Having a system where there is assigned "worry time" where children and young people are able to ask any questions to a trusted adult is helpful. This can help compartmentalise
- Having a visual, whether they are "worry tokens" or question time once or twice a day allows children the opportunity to talk unprompted.
- You don't need to have the answers today! It's ok to say you will look that up and get back to them.



The use of "worry boxes" can also be helpful. Here children can write down or draw their worries and put in the box to help them feel that their worries can be 'held' outside of their own minds. Encourage children and young people to share what's in their box with you once a day if they want to.

In conclusion

- Having a heightened state of anxiety during this time is completely normal
- Explaining COVID-19 in an age and stage appropriate way is vital
- We should focus conversations **in the world of the child and young person**
- Finding creative ways to promote handwashing and being positive with our language is key
- Identifying anxiety is key
- Focusing on facts not fear gives children/young people more control
- Allow for worry time and focus on coping mechanisms

Other Helpful Websites and resources:

Explaining COVID-19

<https://www.bild.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/LD-Senate-Coronavirus-resources-for-use-by-families-27.3.2020.pdf>

<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips.aspx>

https://www.parentingacrossscotland.org/info-for-families/coronavirus/?fbclid=IwAR277z46IYCffWkMstkvhyU2SgYQknEx-5ZC_RwsRGdcalbhJPS7Qg2GNhM

<https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/bps-offers-advice-schools-parents-and-carers-help-children-through-uncertainty>

<https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>

On Anxiety

<https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/Coronavirus%20and%20UK%20schools%20closures%20-%20support%20and%20advice.pdf>

<https://childmind.org/article/what-to-do-and-not-do-when-children-are-anxious/>

<https://depts.washington.edu/hcsats/PDF/TF-%20CBT/pages/combined/CBT-Strategies-for-Worry.pdf>

<https://www.acamh.org/podcasts/dr-jon-goldin-on-the-coronavirus-and-child-mental-health/>

<https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/products/booklet/breathing-and-relaxation-guide/>